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ABSTRACT

This issue of the Australian Early Childhood Association Research in Practice Series provides staff management strategies for directors and others involved with the management of early childhood settings and suggests ways to effectively delegate authority and tasks in order to reduce administrative pressures and workload. The booklet presents three strategies to alleviate pressure on managers and enhance a nurturing environment for staff. Section 1 of the booklet describes the use of shared decision making and presents a step-by-step process for incorporating shared decision making in the early childhood setting. This section also details benefits of this approach and describes situations when it should not be used. Section 2 of the booklet discusses situational leadership, a management technique involving working with staff according to their individual levels of confidence and competence at tasks. This section also describes issues involved in rating employees' levels of confidence and competence at tasks and the importance of selecting the appropriate level for each employee. Section 3 of the booklet describes the development and use of job enrichment statements to encourage innovation, creativity, and a positive, constantly evolving approach to any job within the early childhood setting. A sample job enrichment statement is included. (KB)

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Win-Win Strategies For Managing Early Childhood Settings

*Jacqueline
Hayden*

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Delegation

Win-Win Strategies For Managing

Early Childhood Settings

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About the Author

Jacqueline Hayden has had a diverse career in the field of early childhood education. She has been a teacher and director of preschools and long day care centres, and has worked in policy development and consultation with government departments and non-government agencies around the world. These include Canada, USA, British West Indies, Africa, and Australasia.

Currently she teaches management and policy issues in early childhood education at University of Western Sydney, Nepean.

Opening Note

Managers of all services need to be aware that perceptions of leadership by staff and others are influenced by people's past experiences and by expectations which arise from individual notions related to culture and gender (see Rodd, 1994). Managers themselves may be constrained in their self-perceptions and in their actions because of their own ideas about acceptable ways to behave when in a leadership role. Both the context within which management takes place and the experience and background of those involved will influence the success of any management strategy. For this reason all early childhood practitioners are encouraged to discuss, debate, and articulate the challenges and benefits which are inherent in participatory decision-making and in the approach to individualised management which are recommended in this book. Evidence has shown that these practices can be empowering to all—under a great diversity of conditions.

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Delegation

Win-Win Strategies For Managing Early Childhood Settings

This resource book has been designed to provide strategies for directors/authorised supervisors/licensees, and others involved with the management of early childhood settings. For the purposes of this book I am using the term 'manager' to refer to all of these roles. The manager is anyone who has responsibility beyond that of teaching/working with children in an early childhood setting.

Under current conditions, those with administrative, supervising, coordination, organising, planning, quality control, and public relations/marketing responsibilities in early childhood settings are facing increased pressures, increased workloads, and increased complexities in all of these tasks. There is some concern that managers are also having to do more with less—fewer resources, less support, less time.

This is, for managers in early childhood settings, an era of great challenge. One of the greatest challenges they face is how to keep their staff motivated and how to maintain a creative and innovative environment in the midst of change and disruption.

There are many strategies to alleviate pressure on managers and to enhance a nurturing environment for staff. This book presents three such strategies. These three were chosen because they have proven to be effective; they are easy to implement; and they are great time-savers in the end.

In a previous publication (Hayden, 1996) I described how management tasks can be categorised into four major functions (See Box 1).

Numerous surveys of practising managers in early childhood settings, over several years, continue to indicate that it is the second level—or 'human functions', dealing with staff issues—which continue to be the most perplexing, and time-consuming for managers (see Hayden, 1996).

This book was developed to assist managers in dealing with human functions in a positive win-win manner.

*Managers are having
to do more with
less—fewer resources,
less support, less time*



B o x 1

Delegation: The marvel of management

It is a marvel of management that the most effective strategy for dealing with human functions in any organisation can be reduced to one word. That word is delegation. _____

An important qualifier, however, is that delegation must be *appropriate*—appropriate to the staff person and appropriate to the situation. _____

Delegation is *not* dumping! That is, delegation is not simply handing over your responsibilities or tasks to hapless subordinates.

Delegation is a complex activity which takes both time and skill on the part of the manager. When done properly, however, delegation has a great pay off, for all parties (the delegator and the delegatee).

When done appropriately, delegation is a way of showing respect and trust, providing challenges, engaging in staff development, and giving recognition to staff in early childhood settings. All this while saving time! _____

B o x 2

The outcome of *appropriate* delegation

Appropriate delegation serves two purposes simultaneously.

1. It motivates staff and creates a positive work environment.
2. It releases the manager to concentrate on higher order management skills and practices. _____

How to Delegate (Not Dump!)

Appropriate delegation relies on three strategies. These are

1. Shared decision-making—ensuring that all parties affected take part in making the decision. _____
2. Situational leadership—using different management styles for different staff members. _____
3. Developing job enrichment statements—delegating responsibility for a complete project so that staff can feel ownership of the process and results. _____

Each of these is described in a section in this book. _____

Shared Decision-making

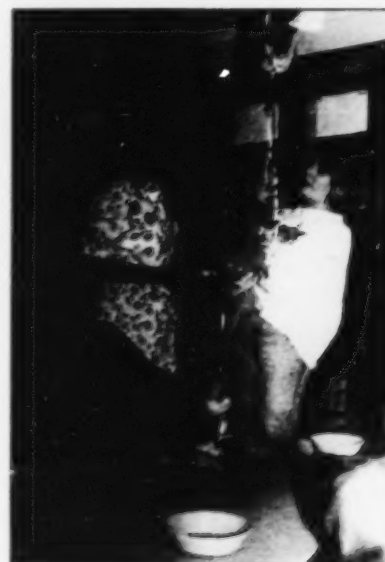
Shared decision-making is one secret of successful management. The theory behind it is that those who are affected in any way by the outcome of a decision should be involved in making the decision. Involvement in decision-making has two overriding benefits:

- 1) It taps into the wealth of experience, creativity, training, interests, skills and ideas of all team members instead of only one or a few.
- 2) It bonds the decision-makers to the decision. That is, those involved maintain an interest in, and commitment to, implementing the decision they have made.

A group decision is always a better decision.

Because of the discussion which must accompany group decision-making, a number of consequences will have been thought through, and the group will have a thorough understanding of the intent—as well as the form—of the decision. Thus they can, and will, implement the decision in a flexible way that makes it work.

In the same vein, decisions that are thrust upon staff 'from above' can cause resentment and misunderstanding, and may even be (consciously or subconsciously) sabotaged by staff who do not understand the purpose of the decision.



Sharing decisions—an example

B o x 3

Equipment purchasing:

In Centre A the director uses the equipment funds to purchase some interesting toys she has seen at a recent toy fair. The staff appreciate the new toys but are not sure how and when to use them. They think the toys are not particularly suited for their group of children. They may resent the fact that the funds were spent without their input. They use the toys sparingly

In Centre B the director does not do the purchasing. She turns the funds over to the teaching groups and instructs them to purchase what they think is best for their children. Teaching groups in Centre B discuss and negotiate how to spend the funds. One group decides to purchase a puppet stage, accessories, and a variety of puppets. Centre B staff feel a commitment to make maximum use of the equipment to prove that their purchases were wise. They also feel empowered and appreciated. One staff member who loves to work with puppets can now use and demonstrate her skills more readily. The children pick up on the staff's enthusiasm and become involved in many puppet learning activities.

Steps to shared decision-making

Shared decision-making can be broken down into a series of 'steps'.

1. Identify the problem and/or issue and who 'owns' it?
2. Identify all the players.
A 'player' is any person who will be involved in the implementation of the decision and/or who will have to 'live with' the decision (could be same as #1).
3. Gather recommendations about how to solve the problem and/or how to address the solution.
4. Collate the recommendations.
5. Ensure that consensus has been reached.

These steps are described in detail alongside.

STEP 1. Identify the problem or decision which needs to be addressed.

Surprisingly, this is the most important and perhaps most difficult part of shared decision-making. In the example above the problem was buying equipment—and the players were obvious—those who would be using the equipment.

Sometimes the 'problem' or issue is not so clear-cut. For example, if staff have been arriving late after their lunch break, if outside supervision does not seem adequate, if some people are asking for additional time off, if children are being picked up late, if some children are not eating some prepared foods. In these cases the manager's task is to clarify what the problem is and who is involved. She or he should seek clarification from all staff for this – and should ensure that those affected by the problem agree with the definition of the problem.

All this can take place in a few minutes in a staff meeting—or it can take several days of informal discussions and probing—but it is well worth the time taken. Flushing out and articulating the problem is half way to solving it.

STEP 2. Include all players.

All staff who are in any way involved with the decision to be made or who will be affected by the outcome need to be included in debates about that decision. The manager and others should do a brainstorming exercise to name the players for this issue/problem. All affected parties must be represented when the issue is being discussed (at times this will include, besides staff, parents, management committee members and, if appropriate, the children).

STEP 3. Gather recommendations about how to solve the problem and/or how to address the solution.

Now that the problem has been defined and players identified, the manager seeks recommendations from all affected parties.

This can be done in a group meeting, through brainstorming, and/or through individual surveys and questionnaires (this latter strategy works well when

parents' views need to be canvassed). Individual meetings with players is another strategy which can be effective, especially if there is concern that some players are shy about offering their ideas in a large group setting.

STEP 4. Collate the recommendations.

If Step #3 involved individual interviews, all players should be called together to review recommendations put forth. Managers should include their own recommendations, along with their rationale for developing these. The entire group should discuss the divergent recommendations until all feel comfortable with the decision. The manager needs to be willing to defer to group recommendations if appropriate. If the manager goes through this process only to re-establish his or her own viewpoint, staff will be frustrated and angry and are unlikely to participate in future exercises of this kind. (See below—when *not* to use shared decision-making)

STEP 5. Ensure that consensus has been reached.

If decisions were made in a public meeting, check out that every staff member agrees to or understands the decision. (A consensus does not mean that everyone agrees with all aspects of the decision, but everyone must agree that this is the best decision which can be made under present circumstances or, at the very least, that they are willing to try out the decision.) Sometimes some staff members do not speak up publicly and later harbour resentment towards a decision. The manager may need to spend some time with each staff member, to check out their feelings towards it, and to let them know that their willingness to compromise for the good of the organisation is appreciated.

If a consentient decision cannot be made, it is the manager's job to focus the decision-making group upon the goals of the organisation, to provide a broad picture of the issue, and to explain constraints which may be imposed from outside forces. Often staff who feel 'heard' will become less rigid about a particular decision, especially when the rationale has been explained in terms of the overriding goals—such as 'the wellbeing of the children' or 'providing support to parents'.



In summary, the benefits of shared decision-making are:

- acknowledgement of the wealth of human resources within a system;
- positive utilisation of these resources;
- stimulation of debate, reflection and discussion of options which often leads to a better decision being made;
- demonstration of respect and trust;
- creation of a challenge;
- guarantee of a bond between decision-making and implementation.

When *not* to use shared decision-making

Nothing is more frustrating to staff than expending energy in discussing options which simply cannot be implemented. During these times the manager must present the decision and state that it is not negotiable. If there are some 'bottom lines' which cannot be changed, these must be communicated to all players *from the start*. If, for example, staff are disgruntled by payment schemes over which the director has no control, the seeking of input for this issue will only exacerbate the disgruntlement. Instead, the director can present the issue as follows:

I am aware that you are unhappy about the payment scheme. I have no control over this. Salaries will not change, no matter what we do. However, we do have control over other areas of our work. What do staff members suggest we do to alleviate our stress?

The manager can focus the group's energy on dealing positively with an unpopular change by debating ways to implement it which will cause the least discontent. This is a positive way to address an unpopular decision, and it detracts from feelings of helplessness when orders are imposed from outside.

While the energy needed to make decisions in a participatory mode seems high, the outcome is always worth the time and effort. Decisions which have the support of all staff are good decisions.



Situational Leadership

Situational leadership is a concept advanced by Ken Blanchard. He believes that one of the most important responsibilities for any manager is to motivate the staff by facilitating their growth and development. This will always result in a better outcome for staff and clients.

In this sense management and teaching are related. Blanchard's approach to management is especially appropriate to early childhood settings, because not only are early childhood managers generally trained in teaching, but they are indoctrinated with the principle that children must be treated individually, according to their individual needs and skills at any given moment for any given task. This is almost an exact parallel of what Blanchard says about managing. One of his axioms is 'There is nothing so unfair as the equal treatment of unequals'.

Blanchard means by this that all staff members come to the task with different levels of competence and confidence, and need to be treated according to their individual strengths and weaknesses. There is no one best style of management. Managers need to become versed in applying different styles and different ways of dealing with each staff member and even with the same staff member at different times. This concept is termed situational leadership. It refers to the need to manage (or lead) according to the conditions of each situation. Just as early childhood teaching depends upon the teacher's ability to make and analyse observations on each child, so too does good management depend upon diagnosing the needs of each staff member. When staff members' needs are diagnosed, then appropriate delegation can be practised.

Appropriate delegation means that the manager delegates the level of responsibility and supervises/supports the staff member according to the needs of the staff member at that time, for that task.

There are four categories or levels through which staff members will pass on their way to becoming confident

*Good management
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each staff member*



*Remember it is NOT fair
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confidence and
competence*

and competent in each task. The manager's job is to assess which level they are on—and deal with them appropriately.

Remember it is NOT fair to deal with all staff members in the same way—it is fair to deal with staff according to their individual levels of confidence and competence.

The four levels of staff competence/confidence are:

Level 1. The staff member is new or inexperienced at the task. They are low on competence. They also exhibit a low level of confidence because the task represents something unfamiliar or untried. (Most staff members are at this level when they enter a new job or take on a new task.)

Level 2. The staff member is more skilled at performing the task, but they still lack confidence.

Level 3. The staff member is quite skilled at handling the task, and feels confident in doing so.

Level 4. The staff member handles the task well and feels very confident in their ability to do so.

Each of these levels calls upon a different style of management.



Level 1: Telling

For Level 1 staff, the manager needs to use a direct telling style. That is the manager needs to be very specific and very authoritarian about what needs to be done. This style, rather than being dictatorial, will provide support and comfort to a worker who is unsure of what to do and how to do it. There is no shame in being at a Level 1 stage of development. Everyone goes through this level when they attack a never-before-attempted task. On the first day at a new job, for instance, even the most experienced of teachers has a low level of competence because they will not know what routine the children are used to, where the equipment is stored, and/ or how transition times are handled. The staff member will appreciate being told what to do and how to do it, at least for now. As they progress through subsequent stages they will gain the competence and confidence to work more independently.

For example, when an employee is new to the centre, they will have a low level of competence. A simple task such as setting out the craft activity may be overwhelming when they do not know where materials are kept, what is meant by craft activity, how children are used to being grouped for the activity, how responsibility for preparation is delegated, etc. This employee will experience stress and discomfort when given too general a direction. The process for dealing with this staff member is to develop competence. The staff member should be told exactly what to do and when. Afterwards they should be complemented for achieving the task. Later, as they become familiar with the task, the manager may ask for their ideas on changes to the routine—but while staff is at Level 1, they have neither the competence nor the awareness of implications to be creative.

Level 2: Selling

The manager's approach to a Level 2 worker is one of *selling*. At this level the staff member exhibits competence in the task they are performing, but lack confidence. The manager *sells* the staff member to himself/herself. That is, the manager builds up confidence in staff by exhibiting trust in them. For example, as staff members exhibit competence in dealing with the craft activity and similar tasks, their level of confidence may waver. They may feel that they can achieve when told exactly what to do, but become frightened of being left to make decisions on their own. The manager bolsters confidence by asking for the staff member's opinion and discussing options with her. For example, the director may ask a new teacher to develop a program for the outdoor play area. The manager asks the teacher to think about how she/he



would do this and to report back the next day. While the teacher is explaining the plan, the manager will provide positive feedback as often as possible. Even when the manager does not agree with all aspects of the program, she/he will articulate confidence in the teacher, saying something like: *Your ideas are very good. I can see that you have thought through what needs to be done.* The manager may still need to temper the plan, but he/she does this in a teaching, not a confronting, way: *Do you foresee any problem with the obstacle course being so close to the swing set?* As staff members come to feel valued for their ideas, they gain confidence and move on to the next stage of development.

Level 3: Participating

The manager's approach for a Level 3 staff member is that of participating. Level 3 is characterised by increasing competence on the part of the staff member and by a high degree of confidence. At this stage the manager collaborates with the staff member on nearly all decisions, giving advice and refining ideas but basically allowing staff members to determine directions for themselves.

In the example above the staff member can now be asked to set up craft activity. The director may ask what he/she has in mind and discuss whether all materials are accessible. The manager may provide some assistance in finding materials and/or in refining ideas. The manager who is dealing with a Level 3 employee who is taking on the outdoor program may comment: *What do you want to do with the outside program. This is an interesting concept which I have not thought of before. Your ideas usually work so let's give it a try. I trust in your judgement.*

Level 4: Delegating

Level 4 is the final, ideal stage. At this stage of development the staff member has reached his/her full potential for a task, and the manager's style becomes one of *delegating*. The staff member is fully competent and possesses confidence to do the task with little or no guidance or support from the manager. Full responsibility for the task is the reward which staff members win by demonstrating their skills. At this level the manager would say to the teacher: *Will you take over the planning of the outdoor area? Delegate tasks to other staff and organise the time and resources as you see fit. I will be eager to hear about how you have done at our staff meeting next week.*

This level of delegation is highly motivational to the staff member who has the ability and confidence to handle it. She/he feels important and trusted. She/he has earned the right to make important decisions and will be given full credit (at the staff meeting) for the work they do. According to motivation theory, the delegation of increased responsibility, the provision of increasing challenges, the feeling that one is given opportunities to grow and to learn on the job, and the conferring of recognition for one's work comprise true motivators which inspire higher and higher levels of commitment and excellence in staff members.

Some notes on situational management

Rating employees

If you are uncertain about the level of the staff member for any particular task, err on the side of going UP the scale. Another strategy is to ask staff members where they see themselves. Most people rate themselves appropriately.

Towards Level 4

The most important aspect of situational leadership is to lead or manage at the appropriate level for each employee. Level 1 staff members who are treated as a Level 4 (that is left to their own devices to work out problems when they do not possess the skills or confidence to do so) will become extremely stressed, angry, and/or frustrated. They will lose confidence and come to see themselves as inadequate, the organisation as unsupportive, and the manager as ineffective.

Meanwhile, treating a Level 4 employee at Level 1 is equally damaging. Highly motivated and competent workers will be stifled, frustrated and angry if they are 'over-supervised'. They will become demotivated and may even revert to destructive behaviour when they feel that they are not given the opportunities to utilise their skills and that they are undervalued as employees.

Bonus for managers

A bonus of achieving Level 4: Delegation stage for managers is that it reduces their hands-on work load and frees them to concentrate on more global aspects of management.

Thus a major goal for every manager is to move every staff member closer and closer to Level 4. When all staff members are at Level 4 for all of their activities—the manager will be free to pursue higher-level, creative activities related to articulating, refining, reassessing, and/or redeveloping the vision/mission for early childhood education at this setting and beyond.

The most important aspect of situational leadership is to lead or manage at the appropriate level for each employee



*Job enrichment
statements encourage
innovation, creativity,
and a positive approach*



What are Job Enrichment Statements?

Job enrichment statements define what each staff person will be doing within a set time. The statements enhance the duties which are outlined in job descriptions, and allow each staff person to grow as a professional—according to their own interests and needs.

Job enrichment statements encourage innovation, creativity, and a positive, constantly evolving approach to any job.

Managers should negotiate job enrichment statements for each employee as soon as they are recruited. After the initial set of statements (can also be referred to as goals) further statements/goals can be renewed in three, six, or 12-month periods, depending upon the level of the staff member.

Job enrichment statements are individualised and will differ for each staff member, even though the job descriptions may be identical.

Developing job enrichment statements could take some time, but having this statement will save time and effort for the manager, and, more importantly, will increase the staff member's satisfaction and effectiveness. Job enrichment statements create a more innovative, creative, and motivating environment in the setting. In the end it is the children and families at the setting who benefit greatly from this management strategy.

How to develop and use job enrichment statements

Job enrichment statements are usually not more than a few sentences in length. They outline a goal which is meaningful and desirable to both the staff member and the manager (who is representing the organisation).

The process for developing job enrichment statements is as follows.

STEP 1. The first step is to set up a statement development meeting. This meeting is of critical importance. When statements are well developed and agreed upon by both parties, subsequent activities such as monitoring assessment become positive, pleasant tasks. The whole process, however, will not work if the manager arbitrarily dictates what the job enrichment statements should be. The manager's role is to encourage the staff member to develop his or her own statements, and then to refine those statements to ensure that they reflect the goals of the organisation (quality of care for children and their families), and that they are achievable within the confines of the job description.

STEP 2. The second step is for the manager to negotiate his or her own side of the contract. The manager negotiates the kind of assistance/support that will be given—and when.

STEP 3. The third step entails formalising the 'contract'. The job enrichment statement(s) and the responsibilities of each party are written up and kept by both parties. This becomes the planning document for the staff person. It allows the staff person (and the manager) to trace progress and development. (Note: A contract is a document which outlines duties and responsibilities between two people or groups. Both parties are responsible for living up to their side of the contract.)



SAMPLE JOB ENRICHMENT STATEMENT

Staff member:

Name _____ Date _____

Statement

Box 5

I will develop a puppet centre in the toddler's room. I will take responsibility for purchasing and programming at this centre. I will organise a puppet workshop for interested staff. _____

I will write a newsletter article about our puppet centre, focusing on the benefits of the centre in child development terms. I will expand this article for a magazine, newspaper or other published source. _____

Manager's responsibilities

Manager to contribute up to \$200 for the puppet centre. _____

Manager to check that best prices for goods are found. _____

Manager to approve and assist with written materials about the puppet centre. _____

Manager to assist with the development of a workshop for staff. _____

Manager to assist with writing tasks. _____

Manager to research sources for dissemination of the written article. _____

This statement to commence on _____ (date) and will be reviewed two months from that date.

STEP 4. Review of statements.

The fourth step is the review meeting. During this meeting the goals themselves are assessed along with a review of accomplishments. New goals are set to reflect new levels of development, new duties, and new interests of staff, and also to take into account organisational, environmental, and systemic changes.

The objective for short-term goals is to monitor frequently so that staff members can move up to subsequent levels as soon as they are ready. Review of Level 1 goals will most likely result in establishing new goals which reflect a Level 2, or even Level 3, stage of development. A goal which reflects Level 4 performance will, on the other hand, be set for a long period (up to one year) unless the employee would like more frequent monitoring.

Summary of Section Three

Job enrichment statements result in delegation to staff in a way that meets their interests and needs. By contracting workloads, including special (self-motivating) projects, staff members determine the amount of supervision wanted/needed from the manager, and move towards increasing levels of independence.

The benefits of job enrichment statements include:

- Staff members are given support to enrich their jobs by taking on projects of their own choosing.
- Managers contract supervision according to the needs and desires of the staff member—and thus are seen to play a supportive, rather than a penalising, role.
- Important enrichment activities for the centre get attended to—and do not get lost because of day-to-day needs. This serves to improve quality care while at the same time motivating and developing staff.
- Staff members can chart their own development by noting (through evolving job enrichment statements) increasing amounts of complexity and responsibility. This results in a feeling of growth and enhanced self-esteem.



Staff members

*determine the amount
of supervision
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and move towards
increasing levels of
independence*

Summary

Management can be a win-win situation when managers learn the secret of appropriate delegation: everyone wins!

Three strategies of delegation are:

Shared decision-making

All players should be involved in making the decisions that will affect them. This strategy results in a better decision because of increased perspectives. Meanwhile shared decision-making motivates staff to ensure that their decision works and alleviates pressure from managers to know everything.

Situational leadership

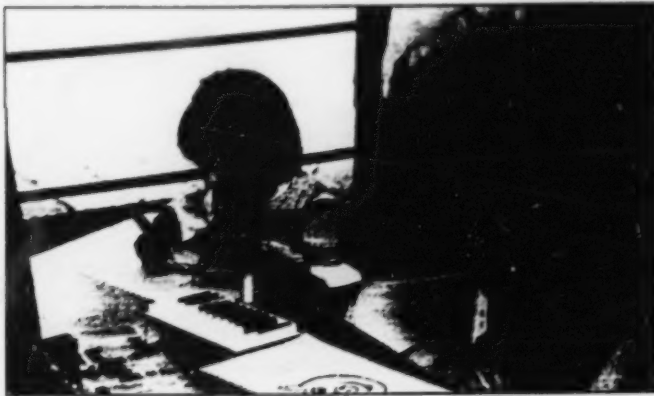
Using this strategy, managers take the time up front to negotiate their leadership style with each staff member. This guarantees that levels of support and direction which managers give match the needs of the staff person for any one activity. The manager's goal is to move each staff member to the fourth level of high competence /high confidence so that maximum delegation can take place.

Job enrichment statements

Managers should negotiate job enrichment statements with each staff member at regular intervals. These

*Shared decision-making
motivates staff to ensure
that their decision
works and alleviates
pressure from managers*





statements include goals for enriching projects and for the professional development of the staff member. The goal statements outline the responsibilities of both the staff and the manager, and give timelines for review and assessment. Managers, where possible, should build in physical supports such as providing a budget and/ or some time release to show a commitment to the project and the staff member.

Some excerpts from this book have been taken from

Hayden, J. (1996) *Management of Early Childhood Services: An Australian Perspective*. Sydney: Social Science Press.

Further Reading

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Kagan, S. & Bowman, B. (1997) *Leadership*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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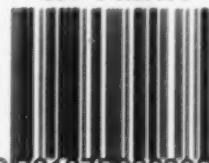
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